

29TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Matthew 22:15–21

“Repay to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God.”

Imagine, for a moment, that someone walked into your home and began placing little labels on everything. On the furniture: **Mine**. On the television: **Mine**. On the car keys: **Mine**. And finally, they walked over to you, placed a label on your chest, and said: **Mine!** I suspect you would have something to say about that! Because deep within the human heart, there is something that resists being owned. We want to be free. We want to belong to ourselves. And yet, today's Gospel confronts us with an extraordinary truth: **The greatest freedom we will ever experience comes from discovering that we belong to God.**

The Pharisees come to Jesus with a question about taxes. They are not interested in economics. They **ARE** interested in destroying Him. If Jesus supports paying taxes, He risks losing the people. If He opposes them, He risks being arrested by Rome. But Jesus does something remarkable. He asks for a coin. He looks at it and asks, “Whose image is this?” ... “Caesar’s.” And then comes that unforgettable answer from **JESUS!** **“Repay to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God.”** Now, we usually hear those words as a lesson about our responsibilities to government and religion. **And certainly, they are.** BUT! ... I believe Jesus is inviting us to hear something much deeper.

Because there is another image in this Gospel that nobody mentions. **The image of God.** In the Book of Genesis, we are told that humanity was created **in God's image and likeness.** Which means that every human being is, in a certain sense, a living coin bearing the image of the Creator. And here is the question: **If we give Caesar the coin because it bears his image, what must we give God, when we ourselves bear His?** The answer is powerful ... **Everything ... We are meant to give EVERYTHING!** Not because God is possessive. Not because He wants to control us. But because He loves us too much to allow us to settle for a life smaller than the one He created us to live.

And perhaps that is the real spiritual struggle of our lives. We are willing to give God many things. A prayer. A donation. An hour at Mass. **BUT** there may be parts of our hearts we quietly reserve for ourselves. Our resentments. Our pride. Our unwillingness to forgive. Our insistence that certain things must happen according to our plans. **We give God our Sunday but sometimes refuse Him our Monday.** And still, Christ waits. He does not force His way into the human heart. He stands before us, with hands wounded by love, asking us to trust Him. Because **the God who asks us to surrender everything is the God who first surrendered everything for us.**

And so, today, perhaps the most important question is not what we owe Caesar. It is this: **What part of my life have I still not given back to God?** Whatever it is, place it into His hands. Because everything we surrender to God in love ... becomes an opportunity for grace.

And remember: **Caesar wanted his image on a coin. God wants His image to shine through your life.**